

Day 27: Growth by PaperBodies

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Summary:

The first time Steve came to visit Billy in the hospital after Starcourt, he brought a tiny plant in a little blue ceramic pot. Billy didn't say anything about it—didn't say much of anything at all for a while—but after Steve left, he stared at the wide, waxy green leaves and the cheerful little red flowers for a long time. Billy made sure no one was around to see him when he carefully watered the plant, and he was secretly thrilled over the following weeks when it seemed to thrive.

Day 27: Growth

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"That's a pretty kalanchoe," one of the nurses said when she saw it.

"A what?" Billy rasped, voice rough with disuse. She stared at him for a moment, surprised that he had spoken, but she recovered quickly.

"Kalanchoe," she said. "It's a type of succulent." She smiled at him. "Someone cares about you," she said, and Billy looked away so she wouldn't see him blush.

Seven months later, when Billy was finally released from the hospital, the little plant was one of the first things he carried into his new, government-funded apartment. He tried to do it discreetly, and if Steve noticed, he didn't say anything about it. Billy set the pot carefully in the kitchen window and ran a careful finger over one of the leaves before he went back to unpacking the boxes that no one would let him carry in from Steve's car.

A year later, a routine patrol through the Hawkins woods—a regular occurrence now that they knew there were still a few packs of stray demodogs trapped on this side of the gate—went sideways fast. Steve got the worst of it, and almost didn't make it out. Billy only left the hospital because El intervened when he started to make a scene, and arguing with a teenager with superpowers was a pointless waste of time. He stood in his kitchen and thought about how Steve had looked, bruised and unconscious and far too pale, and then he opened the cabinets and methodically shattered every dish he owned.

He picked up the blue ceramic pot and drew his arm back to break it too, but he stopped. He drew a couple of shaky breaths and placed the kalanchoe carefully back on the windowsill, sat down hard on his kitchen floor surrounded by the remains of his dishware, and cried. After that, Billy cleaned up his kitchen and decided he was done pretending that he was content to be best friends with Steve Harrington.

A year and three weeks later, Billy bought new dishes and invited Steve over to his apartment for dinner. Billy made pasta and salad and bought a nice wine, and Steve insisted on doing the dishes. He washed exactly one of Billy's new plates before Billy pressed him back against the counter and kissed him, Steve's soapy hands coming up to clutch at Billy's shoulders, pulling him in even closer. When Billy finally broke the kiss to breathe, Steve smiled at him, eyes sparkling.

"I was starting to think you were never going to do that," he murmured, and then he caught sight of the blue ceramic pot on the kitchen windowsill and his eyebrows went up. "Hey, is that still—" was all he got out before Billy's mouth was back on his, and Billy's hands slid *down* and Steve's train of thought derailed entirely.

A year and four weeks later, Steve repotted the kalanchoe in a larger pot, and talked to Billy at length about the dangers of root-bound plants left for too long in tiny little pots. He was knowledgeable and sincere, and Billy interrupted him frequently to kiss him, just because he could.

A year and a half later, the kalanchoe was the first thing that Billy carried into their new shared apartment. He placed it carefully on the windowsill, where it was joined by Steve's profusion of herbs and other succulents.

"Someday we're going to buy a house," Billy whispered to Steve that

first night, as they cuddled in their very own shared bed, sweaty and sated.

“Yeah?” Steve asked, sleepy and content.

“Yeah. And it’s going to have a big garden, and we’re going to live somewhere where it doesn’t snow so you can grow things year-round.”

“All I’m hearing is that you’re going to take me back to California with you someday and buy me a garden.” Billy pulled back a little bit so he could see Steve’s face.

“Do you want that?” he asked, suddenly a little shy. Steve just smiled at him, eyes warm.

“Course I do, B,” he said, leaning in to press a kiss to Billy’s temple. “It sounds perfect. And the kalanchoe is going into the garden first.”

Author's Note:

Fun fact: kalanchoe plants symbolize lasting affection, which is a thing I did not know when I first chose it for this fic. I just have one and I like it!